

## THE REFLECTION OF THE UNION OF TRANSYLVANIA WITH ROMANIA IN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS FROM THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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**Abstract** The present paper argues that the history textbooks (re)produce the collective memory of a series of key events to which they assign importance, thereby making them official. In-depth revisions of Romanian history have taken place regularly. The most significant historical events have been rewritten and subjected to interpretation through an ideological lens, in accordance with the imperatives of a certain period. The foundation for how a crucial moment, such as the 1918 Union, is interpreted and remains present in collective memory to this day is rooted in its representation in the history textbooks from the interwar period. The textbooks establish and reproduce hierarchical values and legitimise events in the national memory registers. Below, I will analyse the historical narratives that recount the 1918 Union which can be found in the history textbooks authored by Ioan Lupaș, Th. Aguletti and Marian Petrescu. I consider them representative given that they were reprinted numerous times, as they act as the primary conveyors of the official history in schools. The premise is that the basic means whereby the mainstream national memory was embedded are found in these history textbooks. Despite the successive rewritings of history, the way in which the 1918 Union was interpreted has a solid starting point in different versions of the historical narrative from the interwar period.

**Keywords** Union, war, royalty, nation, Greater Romania.

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ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1058-4946>.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2024.29.2.03>.

The present work was supported by UEFISCDI, as part of the research program *Românii despre maghiari, maghiarii despre români: două secole de oglindire reciprocă (1789-2007)* [Romanians about Hungarians, Hungarians about Romanians: two centuries of mutual reflection (1789-2007)], project code PN-III-P4-PCE-2021-0262, project director Univ. Prof. Dr. Sorin Mitu.

History is not, as it is often perceived, a story of a grandiose past brought to life through wars, collective tragedies, drama, captivating events, or heroes and ancestors. Instead, it is more accurately a preservation of collective memory. Unquestionably, history represents the way people who live together and form a nation have been rooted in glorious pasts, the grammar of national self-acknowledgement and the logic of collective belonging. The teaching of history in schools was a priority for the nation-states at least beginning with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus instilling a sense of belonging into a nation and contributing to the formation and consolidation of a national identity.

Academic research widely acknowledges the importance of the great national historical narratives within the processes of identity formation, as “cultural instruments”<sup>1</sup> that bear and transmit the official discourses produced to give meaning to past events and to create a cohesion in the present in its relation to the past.<sup>2</sup>

By focusing primarily on the narratives found in school textbooks, we illustrate the idea that this type of history, namely the history taught in schools, offers content structured into an official narrative of a shared past which, in addition to its significant emotional load, intended to make the readers identify with the national heroes and ancestors, and to generate a feeling of loyalty and belonging.<sup>3</sup> History taught in school is therefore the official, canonical version of a past built in accordance with the romantic paradigm and imbued with a strong emotional charge.

The article conducts a discursive and narrative analysis of the historical texts found in the first textbooks published after the 1918 Union, which are representative given their numerous reprints and continuous relevance throughout the interwar period. In complementing the studies on the establishment of the Romanian historical consciousness, the article analyses a focal event in history, namely the 1918 Union, in a manner that has been almost overlooked – its depiction in the history textbooks written shortly after the event. The studies in this field are mostly focused on analysing certain specific events (the two world wars, for instance) or investigating how these events have been interpreted ideologically, in a period when historical writing was strongly revised. Therefore, the article focuses on how the 1918 union of Transylvania with Romania was depicted in the first textbooks of the interwar period, given that this depiction has remained canonical, rooting this key historical moment into the collective memory. Almost each event in our national history requires a parenthesis

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<sup>1</sup> See James V. Wertsch, “Narratives as Cultural Tools in Sociocultural Analysis: Official History in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia,” *Ethos* 28, no. 4 (2000): 511–33.

<sup>2</sup> See Maria Grever, Tina, van der Vlies, “Why national narratives are perpetuated: A literature review on new insights from history textbook research,” *London Review of Education* 15, no.2 (2017): 287.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter I, “Three Meanings of History,” in *Teaching History and Memories in Global Worlds. Constructing Patriotism*, Mario Carretero (ed.) (2011) (ebook): [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282120016\\_Teaching\\_History\\_and\\_Memories\\_in\\_Global\\_Worlds\\_Constructing\\_Patriotism\\_ebook](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282120016_Teaching_History_and_Memories_in_Global_Worlds_Constructing_Patriotism_ebook) (accessed on 25 October 2024).

containing its interpretation in the communist period, and the one under investigation in the present paper makes no exception.

Three of the analysed textbooks were authored by Ioan Lupaş, a renowned historian who participated in the Great National Assembly of Alba Iulia. Lupaş had a broader perspective on the topics and was, in general, an author of national history books and textbooks. A remarkable professional who had studied in Budapest and Berlin, Lupaş was also a teacher at the “Andreian Pedagogical Theological Institute” in Sibiu for almost four years. After that, he had an academic career and focused mainly on research. His textbook on Romanian history was reprinted many times and was one of the most highly regarded history textbooks until 1948.<sup>4</sup> The other textbooks under scrutiny, which depict world history, were edited by Th. Avr. Aguletti, a former teacher, former inspector and director of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Together with Marian Petrescu, he primarily authored world history textbooks in which the different subjects were approached as an integral part of world history, from angles that differed from those found in the textbooks written by Lupaş. These textbooks were also reprinted successively.<sup>5</sup> Lupaş reprinted his own textbooks which he revised and expanded without nuancing the initial narrative at all, while the other authors have a rather simple view on the main national historical events which they integrate into the wider context of world history.

History as *magistra vitae*, or history that primarily teaches us about the present, are the messages conveyed in the prefaces of the sample textbooks under scrutiny. As Lupaş shows, beyond its epistemic value, history is undoubtedly extremely important within the wider constellation of scientific fields. History is the foundation on which the present is built, providing the possibility of obtaining the integral knowledge of the life of a nation. The deeds of the past continue to influence the present in different forms, and the connection between the past and the present must be studied in the interest of the present.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, history has an inspirational value, since it records the forerunners’ heroism and sacrifices that led to the accomplishments of the present. This type of knowledge, therefore, leads to an understanding of the present and its problems.<sup>7</sup> In order to emphasise the foundational role of history, Lupaş introduces a metaphor-comparison between the being of a plant and the being of a people, arguing that just as the root plays a fundamental role for a plant, so does history play a fundamental role for a people or nation. History is the root in the absence of which we could not know everything about ourselves. History is thus the foundation of identity and becoming. In the preface of the textbook authored by Aguletti in 1921, the role of history is expanded to not only the knowledge of the past of one’s own people, but also the knowledge of the past of neighbouring peoples as “neighbours, friends, and enemies.” Its role is thus

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<sup>4</sup> Gheorghe Iuţiu, *Din istoria literaturii didactice româneşti: manualele de istorie naţională (secolul al XIX-lea-prima jumătate a secolului al XX-lea)* (Iaşi, “Palatul Culturii”, 2011), 67.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. I. Lupaş, *Istoria Românilor pentru clasa a VII-a secundară* (Bucureşti, Editura Librăriei SOCEC & Co, S.A, 1931), 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

expanded towards acquiring knowledge of the world, alterity, and the paradigms of civilisation. The value of history is moral, epistemic, political and pedagogical, the history textbooks encapsulating the memory of a nation and the markers of its identity.

An analysis of the textbooks brings forth several themes around different discursive tropes. The main theme, that of the union of the Romanian people in 1918, develops as an emotional discourse about freedom and joy, which, in fact, represents the climax for the Romanians in Transylvania, the triumph of justice. Up to that point, the history of Transylvania (separate from that of Romania) had been a painful one, with Romanians depicted as victims. The history of Transylvania is shown as a continuum of conflicts, both real and symbolic, between Romanians and Hungarians, a mixture of victimisation and heroic resistance. Therefore, even depicted in short, the Union is outlined as a key moment in the evolution of the nation, a marker in the history of all Romanians, the foundational act of the nation-state. The moment is charged with enthusiasm and represents the triumph of the principle of self-determination, in addition to the triumph of the general will to accomplish this act, the dream of the war generation. The Union has remained one of the most important events in the history of our region.

The textbooks and the official discourse on the Union of Transylvania with Romania show that the event is represented as a meta-event associated with enthusiasm and joy, as the fulfilment of the national destiny. The exact same themes can be found in today's official public discourse, namely the union as the foundation of the nation-state, as an expression of the people's will as well as their enthusiasm. In a speech held by president Klaus Iohannis on the day celebrating the Union, he points out the uniqueness and grandeur of this moment, arguing that the past, through the strong national feelings it conveys, compels and holds the present accountable: "We, the people of today, are privileged to have inherited the fruits of the most important project that has ever been completed in the area of our ancestors. It is our duty and responsibility to pay homage to the past and to instil into the future generations the national ideals recharged with new meanings."<sup>8</sup>

## 1. Narratives of freedom and joy: the war, the union, the royalty

As opposed to most historical periods, the interwar period seems devoid of any ideological direction that had to be followed by the school textbooks. They were generally disconnected from the political agenda of the time, unlike those used in the communist period. The

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<sup>8</sup> Original text: "*Noi, cei de astăzi, avem privilegiul de a fi moștenit rodul celui mai important proiect concretizat vreodată în spațiul strămoșilor noștri. Este datorია și responsabilitatea noastră de a omagia trecutul și de a insufla generațiilor viitoare idealurile naționale reîncărcate cu noi semnificații.*" Unless marked otherwise, all Romanian quotations were translated by the translator of this article. See "Alocuțiunea președintelui Klaus Iohannis la Alba Iulia," *Radio România Actualități*, <https://www.romania-actualitati.ro/stiri/romania/alocutiunea-a-presedintelui-klaus-iohannis-la-alba-iulia-id117817.html> (accessed on 7 August 2024).

textbooks published shortly after the Union were the textbooks of a transition period. There was no standardised textbook, but rather several history textbooks intended for different types of schools. The recent events, such as the war and the subsequent Union, sparked emotional narratives from the authors. They are treated in a celebratory spirit, as a tribute to the sacrifices made for the fulfilment of the historical destiny. They are many references to the national mythology and an acknowledgement of its significance in the creation of the nation. The Union is seen as a moment of glory achieved through suffering, the peak moment of the entire history. In addition to the emphasis placed on the deep interconnectedness between the war, the royalty and this momentous event, the Union is represented as a unique moment that can never be surpassed.

## The War

The first theme that emerges from the historical narrative of the textbooks is the war. It is described as a preamble to the Great Union, in which the royalty played a major role, and as an essential part of the national mythology. As an intensely ideologized event across different historical eras, particularly during the communist period, the war is depicted in the interwar history textbooks as a process that led to the establishment of the national state. The great conflict is treated especially as an homage paid to the sacrifice, the war effort, while also mentioning the moral dilemmas generated by this event among the soldiers compelled to fight *under a foreign flag*. World War I was imprinted in the national memory through these textbooks, as an event that changed history, that gave Romanians the possibility to fulfil the political dream of a generation, namely the Union of all Romanian-inhabited provinces and the establishment of the national state. Romania joined the war for the purpose of fulfilling this very historical destiny.

There is a discursive and conceptual continuity regarding the interpretation of the war among the textbook authors from the interwar period. The war is mainly seen as the essential step taken towards the Union. Despite the sacrifice and despite the soldiers' dilemmas (particularly in the case of those from Transylvania, who fought against the Romanian army), the war is treated as a mixture of fear and hope, an important opportunity to accomplish the Union: "the premonition that this war would make the sun of justice rise for them as well had taken root in the hearts and minds of all."<sup>9</sup> The war is part of the teleological narrative of the establishment of the nation and, just like the Union, it is an essential reference point within the national mythology, a marker in the evolution of the nation.

Even the name that is bears in the textbooks is that of "the war for the national unity" or "the war for the unity of the people." These names lead to the interpretation of the world conflagration as a step towards the fulfilment of the national project, namely the Union of the

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<sup>9</sup> Original text: "în gândul și în inima tuturor încolțise presimțirea că războiul acesta va face să răsară și pentru ei soarele dreptății." Dr. Ioan Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1923), 366.

Romanian provinces and the establishment of the national state. Nicolae Iorga's famous manifesto *Toți împreună* [All Together], which is reproduced in Lupaș's textbook, argues that the war required solidarity and immense sacrifices. The appeal to solidarity (all together) is one of the most moving messages, given that it was addressed to the Romanian soldiers conscripted into the armies of other nations and fighting against *their own brethren*. This dramatic situation was emphasised by a vast literature focusing on this very subject. Nicolae Iorga, through this manifesto, encouraged the young soldiers in this situation to see beyond the drama of the war, their personal drama, to see the higher purpose, the promise of fulfilling a national destiny through their sacrifice – that of battle itself and that of their heroism, one that is, apparently, not in the service of their own nation: “Be joyful, you who, under foreign commands, die under a foreign flag! Somewhere, another flag rises as you spend your bravery, give your young blood (...) and know that your descendants (...) will all be united.”<sup>10</sup> Through suffering, pain, death and heroism, the solidarity of the descendants and the much-desired unity emerge, given that the manifesto suggests that the great sacrifice leads to the unity and to the formation of the nation state. For this very reason, the struggle and sacrifice must be mobilising, they are by no means in vain. It is more than an emotional call for solidarity, it is a psychological mobilisation and a leitmotif of the entire conflict for the Romanians in Transylvania.

In the textbooks, the ideas regarding the war focus both on heroism and on betrayals, although, generally, the emphasis falls on the proven bravery at the front despite the Romanian army's shortages, all for the purpose of fulfilling the dream of a generation. The idea that no other army was in a more difficult situation during the war<sup>11</sup> is intended to give more weight to the contribution of the Romanian army to the general war effort and to deepen the idea of the sacrifice made for the national ideal. The idea of the ultimate sacrifice is emphasised by other methods as well. If Lupaș outright states the superior nature of the Romanian army's hardships as “during the World War, no other army faced a more difficult situation,”<sup>12</sup> Aguletti emphasises that Romania had the longest front in Europe<sup>13</sup> (which was also a means to express the difficulties faced by the Romanian soldiers). The shortcomings faced by the Romanian army, which are part of the reality of war, are mentioned as an expression of the Romanian soldiers' heroism and commitment to fight in any conditions: “the army numbered over half a million people but was inadequately armed. The Allies, however, promised that once we join the war, they would support us.”<sup>14</sup> This point expressed the idea of

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<sup>10</sup> Original text: “*să fiți voioși aceia, care în strigăte de comandă străină, sub steag străin muriți! Undeva un alt steag se ridică în măsura în care voi vă cheltuiți vitejia, vă dați sângele vostru tânăr (...) și să știți că urmașii voștri (...) vor fi toți împreună.*” Ibid., 366.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>12</sup> Original text: “*în cursul războiului mondial nicio armată n-a avut o situație mai grea.*” Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor pentru cursul superior de liceu*, 1931, 333.

<sup>13</sup> Th. Avr Aguletti, Marin Petrescu, *Istoria românilor clasa a IV-a secundară* (Bucharest: Editura “Cartea Românească”, 1936), 226.

<sup>14</sup> Original text: “*armata trecea peste jumătate de milion de oameni dar nu era destul de bine înarmată, Aliații în schimb au promis că îndată ce vom intra în război, vom fi sprijiniți.*” Ibid., 226.

“us against all,” given that, as the textbooks show, the promised weapons did not arrive and the support was completely absent: “we were left to face the enemy alone and poorly equipped.”<sup>15</sup> By mentioning the difficult battles that the Romanians fought in Dobrogea, the defensive retreat on the Transylvanian front, and the withdrawal from Moldova, the authors of the textbooks unanimously emphasise the broad support eventually received from the Allies, especially the French, singling out General Berthelot.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the many dramatic moments and true tragedies for the Romanians during the war, such as the painful defeats at Turtucaia, Neajlov and Sibiu, as well as the retreat to Moldova, with the capital, Bucharest, and two-thirds of the country occupied, there were also resounding victories, such as those at Oituz, Mărăști, and Mărășești, which are all mentioned in the textbooks. They are celebrated particularly because they speak of heroism and sacrifice. All three victories are considered “brilliant triumphs that will remain memorable in the history of our people.”<sup>17</sup> In order to emphasise the Romanian army’s heroism, the textbooks single out these battles as heroic bravery, where “the glory of the famous front-breaker, the reputation of the German general Mackensen, who was victorious everywhere during the course of the war, was buried.”<sup>18</sup> The uniqueness of the Romanian army, the relentless battles and heroism are the essential attributes that led to victory. The hall of fame of Romanian generals mentions Alexandru Averescu, Eeremia Grigorescu and Const. Cristescu.<sup>19</sup>

The references to the war (that also play the role of emphasising the heroism of the Romanian army) also include the descriptions of the war after the war. The textbooks recount, in detail, the “occupation of Budapest.” The Red Army of the Hungarian Republic, led by Béla Kun, *after some success, having managed to cross the Tisza River*, received the crushing blow from the Romanian army, which was victorious after intense battles and managed to enter Budapest, to dismantle the regime of terror and to install a national government. As Lupaș writes, the population received the Romanian soldiers with open arms, deeming them their liberators. The same author notes: “of all the Entente armies that fought for four years (1914-1918) against the Central Powers, only the Romanian army managed to enter victorious into the capital of one of the countries belonging to these powers.”<sup>20</sup>

An analysis of the ideas found in a sample of representative textbooks regarding the Great War, which form the foundation of what has remained in public memory, we can assert

<sup>15</sup> Original text: “am rămas singuri și slab înarmați în fața dușmanului.” Ibid., 228.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>17</sup> Original text: “biruințe strălucite care vor rămânea memorabile în istoria poporului nostru.” Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1931), 333.

<sup>18</sup> Original text: “s-a îngropat gloria vestitului spărgător de fronturi, faima generalului german Makensen, biruitor pretutindeni în cursul războiului.” Ibid., 333.

<sup>19</sup> Aguletti, Petrescu, *Istoria românilor*, 230.

<sup>20</sup> Original text: “dintre toate armatele Antantei, câte au luptat timp de 4 ani (1914-1918) împotriva puterilor centrale, numai armata română a reușit să intre biruitoare în capitala uneia din țările aparținătoare acestei puteri.” Dr. I. Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei SOCEC and Co, S.A, 1930), 314-315.

that the most important idea surrounding this conflict is that it ultimately led to the achievement of the Union of 1918. As the authors argue, the Great War led to the Union of all the Romanian-inhabited provinces into the new state created in 1918. Through immense efforts, sacrifice and heroism, Greater Romania was formed. Today, the official discourse is congruent with the one present in these textbooks, given that they both emphasise the importance of the war in achieving the Union, with one notable exception, namely that the war was also essential to the European evolution of today's Romania.<sup>21</sup> The war, as depicted in the textbooks, encapsulates the ideas of sacrifice, heroism, solidarity and perseverance for the fulfilment of the national destiny and the centuries-old dream, the Union with Romania. The discourse on the war present in the textbooks is centred on the idea of the sacrifice made by our ancestors, which creates a sense of indebtedness, emphasizing a struggle that overlooks minor goals in favour of the higher purpose of fulfilling the nation's glorious destiny. In terms of length, the war covers the most space in the textbooks compared to the other themes, such as the Union itself and the monarchy, as an event perfectly aligned with history and spiced with drama, gallantry, sacrifice and, ultimately, the well-deserved victory that led to the establishment of Greater Romania.

## The Union

The year 1918 is truly and symbolically a bridge: between eras, regimes and stages. The Union surpasses the war in importance given that it is undoubtedly a key event in the Romanian national mythology and history. Today's official discourse on the 1918 Union shows a discursive continuity with the interwar textbooks regardless of authors.

Generally, in these textbooks, the national narratives that centre around the Union are brief and concise, lacking unnecessary details. The authors place the Union within a broader context, as the culmination of a series of historical events, as a triumph. It is the triumphant outcome of the Great War, of the principle of self-determination, elaborated by the American president Woodrow Wilson, which led to the unification of all Romanian-inhabited territories into one national state.<sup>22</sup> Equally, the Union is the clear expression of popular will, namely the fulfilment of a "secular dream," and popular enthusiasm. The Union of Transylvania with Romania is also described as a crucial event that represents the triumph of historical justice and rectifies an "entire series of historical injustices."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Alocuțiunea Președintelui României, domnul Klaus Iohannis, susținută cu prilejul ceremoniei naționale dedicate marării a 100 de ani de la intrarea României în Primul Război Mondial," on the official website of the Romanian presidency, <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/agendapresedintelui/alocutiunea-presedintelui-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis-sustinuta-cu-prilejul-ceremoniei-nationale-dedicat-mararii-a-100-de-ani-de-la-intrarea-romaniei-in-primul-razboi-mondial> (accessed on 8 August 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1923), 368.

<sup>23</sup> Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1931), 335.



In the textbooks, the Union is seen from two angles: (1) as part of the national history and (2) as part of world history. The latter perspective, shared by authors such as Theodor Avr. Aguletti and Marin Petrescu, places the Union into the broader, international context of the fall of empires (the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Tsarist Empire) and the formation of nation states based on the ethnic principle. Within the narrower, national framework, the Union is presented as the culmination of Romania's participation in the Great War. In this context, the textbooks emphasize the popular will to achieve the Union based on the principle of self-determination. This perspective (found predominantly in Ioan Lupaș's textbooks) is framed by an extensive preamble narrating the victimisation and heroic resistance of Transylvanian Romanians, who were deprived of rights after Transylvania's inclusion in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Regardless of the perspective, the Union, as a key historical event, has inspired authors to produce narratives imbued with strong emotional dimension.

In the textbooks edited by Ioan Lupaș, the Union is strongly linked to the war and royalty. As the most popular textbook of its time, it was successively reprinted, and the author integrates the Union in the chapter entitled *Domnia regelui Ferdinand I. Războiul pentru reîntregirea României. Reformele* [The reign of King Ferdinand I. The War for the unification of Romania. The reforms]. Very succinctly, the historian recounts the importance of 1 December 1918 as "a very important day in the history of the Romanian people."<sup>24</sup> The 1931 edition of his textbook continues to recognize the great significance of this day by describing it as "a memorable day in the history of the Romanian people."<sup>25</sup> He further argues that Romania achieved its territorial integrity due to the principle of self-determination that opened the path for the *enthusiastic decisions of the Romanian people*.<sup>26</sup> Lupaș points out the significance of 1 December by noting the enthusiasm of the participants in Alba-Iulia where "our national unity and freedom were achieved."<sup>27</sup>

In their textbook, Aguletti and Petrescu include the Union in the chapter devoted to the war, referred to as "the war for the people's unity,"<sup>28</sup> as a separate issue from the *Great War* or the *World War*, which encompasses the chronological events leading to Romania's entry into the war in 1916, the period of neutrality. The phase following Romania's entry into the war is approached separately, as the war for the nation's reunification. The suggestion that Romania entered the war specifically to achieve the Union is very clear.

The Union is, in fact, a short subsection of the chapter devoted to the Great War and its end. The unions of Transylvania and Bukovina with Romania are discussed together. The only detail that separates them is their chronology, namely 28 November 1918 when the Union of Bukovina with Romania was proclaimed in Chernivtsi, and 1 December 1918 when the Union of

<sup>24</sup> Original text: "o zi foarte însemnată în istoria Românilor." Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1930), 314.

<sup>25</sup> Original text: "o zi memorabilă în istoria Românilor." Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1931), 336.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Original text: "războiul pentru întregirea neamului." Th. Avr. Aguletti, Marin Petrescu, *Manual de istorie pentru clasa a III-a secundară și normală*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească), 202.

Transylvania with Romania was proclaimed in Alba Iulia.<sup>29</sup> In summarising the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) and the signed treaties, including the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary, the authors note: “these powers were required to pay reparations, both monetary and in kind, and to liberate the nations they had kept subjugated.”<sup>30</sup>

Agulletti and Petrescu describe both the war and the Union as events integrated in world history. In the European context, the collapse and disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the Russian Empire finally led to the formation of nation states, including Romania.<sup>31</sup> They also point out Hungary’s inability to accept the new situation and that the establishment of the so-called Little Entente, a pact signed between Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in 1921, was a result of Hungary’s desperate propaganda across the world and her secret preparations for war. They argue that the purpose of this pact was to prevent any unpleasant surprises from Hungary.<sup>32</sup> Another edition of Agulletti and Petrescu’s textbook only mentions that, following the Treaty of Trianon, “Romania almost fully achieved its national goal. The provinces under foreign rule were annexed to the motherland, first through their own wish and later through the formal sanction of the world conference itself.”<sup>33</sup>

Whether integrated into the national history as the expression of the Romanians’ will to unite into one national state or placed within world history and the context of the dissolution of empires and the creation of nation states, the Union remains a momentous, unique and unparalleled event in Romanian history. Perhaps treated too briefly and concisely in the textbooks under analysis, the 1918 Union is depicted as closely tied to the war and to royalty, as the founding act of the national state.

### The Romanian Kings

Another emerging theme, strongly connected to the war and to the Union, is that of the royalty. Romanian kings were celebrated in the textbooks for their decisive actions to achieve the national goal of unifying all Romanians in one state.

The King is portrayed as a paternal figure, his legitimacy deriving from God who sent him to the throne in order to achieve the supreme goal: “Sire, you are God’s envoy to fulfil the dream of a nation.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the king is the prototype of the good Romanian, an ideal, almost a paradox if we were to consider that his origins were Germanic. This was actually the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>30</sup> Original text: “*aceste puteri au trebuit să dea despăgubiri în bani și în natură și să libereze națiunile ce le țineau subjugate.*” Ibid., 208.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 208-209.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>33</sup> Original text: “*România și-a văzut îndeplinit țelul ei național aproape complet. Provinciile de sub stăpâniri străine au fost alipite patriei mume la început prin însăși dorința lor și apoi prin consfințirea conferinței mondiale însăși.*” Ibid., 208.

<sup>34</sup> Original text: “*Sire, ești trimisul lui Dumnezeu ca să împlinești visul unui neam.*” Lupaș, *Istoria Românilor* (1923), 382.

promise, that of a king with foreign origins for whom duty and love for the country take precedence: “Five years have passed since I declared, in a solemn moment, that I would be a good Romanian and that I would be so until the end of my days, for in my heart there is not stronger feeling than love of country.”<sup>35</sup> The royal promise was fulfilled as proven throughout his glorious reign by the fact that he abandoned his own interests in favour of the country’s interests.

The king’s inner struggles are well-known. His turmoil was caused by Romania’s entry into the war, his German origin requiring rather an alliance with the Central Powers. In this personal struggle and the conflict between origins and duty, duty prevailed as he clearly understood the higher interests with which he identified and thus placed the interests of his country above any kind of personal interests or desires. This represents his moral legacy alongside the extraordinary legacy of a country that fulfilled its *centuries-old dream* of uniting all Romanians into one state. Through all of this, the king also holds a charismatic legitimacy, the power of his personal example being evident. Moreover, he is an inspiring figure through his resolute leadership and unwavering loyalty to his country’s interests.

In the 1929 edition of Lupaş’s textbook there is an expanded portrait of King Ferdinand in addition to his testament and a posthumous letter in which he restates his concern for the country’s fate and his personal belief that duty does not end with death but goes beyond it. The textbooks glorify the monarch for this very sense of duty and view him as a moral barometer. According to Lupaş, the king’s unofficial testament reveals him as *a man of absolute duty*, a paternal figure concerned about the fate of his country even beyond his earthly existence. He is placed in the pantheon of “the most glorious rulers,”<sup>36</sup> given that he became the first king of a united Romania.

Ferdinand is an ideal king. All the analysed textbooks cultivate the figure of an almost messianic monarch with an extreme and unifying sense of duty, a truly charismatic figure who, through the decisions he made in the country’s interest, crucially contributed to the fulfilment of the national ideal.

Queen Maria’s figure is more complex. She is depicted firstly as a mother, a hero, a character who inspires through her active involvement in the war. However, she also goes beyond a woman’s traditional, motherly role by being a decisive woman of action. Through these textbooks, she remained in the public consciousness as someone who spared no effort to help those in need at the front. Her attitude was that of a mother who loves her sons: “she comforted the sad, she cared for the sick and the wounded. She was like a loving mother to all the country’s sons.”<sup>37</sup> She is the only female figure that the textbooks mention in connection

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<sup>35</sup> Original text: “Sunt cinci ani de când am spus, într-un moment solemn că voi fi un bun Român și voi fi până la sfârșitul meu, căci în inima mea nu este alt sentiment mai tare decât iubirea de țară.” Ioan Lupaş, *Trecutul nostru românesc-scurt manual de istorie națională* (Sibiu: Editura Asociației Astra, Tiparul Institutului de Arte Grafice “Dacia Traiană,” 1934), 234.

<sup>36</sup> Original text: galeria “*celor mai glorioși domnitori.*” Lupaş, *Istoria Românilor* (1930), 320.

<sup>37</sup> Original text: “*a mângâiat pe cei întristați, a îngrijit pe cei bolnavi, răniți. A fost ca o mamă iubitoare pentru toți fiii patriei.*” Lupaş, *Istoria românilor* (1923), 380.

with the conflict (later, Ecaterina Teodoroiu will also be included). Unfortunately, they overlook and completely render invisible the thousands of other women who participated as volunteers in the Great War.

The history textbooks capture the emergence of certain charismatic, unifying and messianic royal figures. The coronation of Romanian kings in Alba Iulia is also significant, as this symbolic location of the Union is also celebrated given that prince Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul) became the ruler of the three Romanian countries precisely in this place in 1600.

The royal program, as outlined in the history textbooks, involves both monarchs and aims for the prosperity and well-being of each social class individually and of the newly established country in general. The king's proclamation on the day of his coronation expresses this very view: from the peasantry "that forever rules the lands they acquired to make them as fertile as possible for its own benefit and the benefit of all"<sup>38</sup> to the workers, the program targets all social categories.<sup>39</sup> The king's proclamation stands out due to its highly democratic nature. In accordance with the proclamation of Transylvanian Romanians in Alba Iulia, the king emphasises:<sup>40</sup> "my wish is that within the realms of Greater Romania, all of the country's good sons, regardless of their religion or nationality, may hold the rights equal to all Romanians (...)." <sup>41</sup>

Thus, Greater Romania is a state with democratic foundations, in which all citizens are equal as opposed to the painful experiences of Transylvanian Romanians in the recent past. The Romanian monarchs earned their right to a prominent place in the pantheon of the Union. This momentous event would not have happened had it not been for their patriotism, decisive leadership and extraordinary sense of duty.

## 2. Painful Narratives. The Hungarians and the Romanians from Transylvania before the Union

The emotional narratives of the freedom and joy centred around the Union are preceded by painful narratives, a real and symbolic endless conflict between Transylvanian Romanians and Hungarians. The Romanians' narratives of victimisation and injustice are intrinsically linked to the 1918 Union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania, which appears as an act of justice for the Romanians living in this province. Moreover, the textbook's authors argue that Transylvanian Romanians' self-perception as victims of injustices was rather a mobilising factor that brought them increasingly closer to their *brethren* across the Carpathians.

Most of the narratives in this section revolve around the deprivation of national and linguistic rights, the obstruction of cultural progress and the imprisonment of Transylvanian Romanian leaders who fought for these rights. The textbook authors perceive the Dualist era

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<sup>38</sup> Original text: "stăpână pe veci pe hotarele pe care le-a dobândit să le dea toată puterea de rodire în favoarea ei și a binelui obștesc."

<sup>39</sup> Lupaș, *Istoria românilor* (1923), 383.

<sup>40</sup> See *Proclamația de la Alba Iulia* [The proclamation in Alba Iulia]: <https://www.cimec.ro/istorie/unire/alba.htm> (accessed on 29 October 2024).

<sup>41</sup> Lupaș, *Istoria românilor* (1923), 383.

as the peak because it was then that the situation of Romanian took a sharp turn for the worse. They argue: “the so-called dualism was established between Hungary and Austria,” while “the other peoples were not recognized as political nations.”<sup>42</sup> The narratives in which the Transylvanian Romanians are depicted as victims speak volumes of the period in which their linguistic, political, cultural and religious rights were denied. Noting that the Union of Transylvania with Hungary was proclaimed first in 1848 and then again in 1865 when the Romanian and Saxon representatives protested it, the authors, particularly Lupaş, place Transylvanian Romanians in the position of victims of injustices and abuses.

To illustrate this position, Lupaş offers a wide array of arguments, namely the arbitrary nature of the measures taken by Hungarians and Transylvanian Romanians’ inability to react. To emphasise the duplicity of Hungarian politicians, Lupaş mentions the Nationality Law of 1868. It is a known fact that, by this law, Hungarians intended to award certain rights to non-Hungarians in the spheres of administration, justice and education. However, it could not be applied because Hungarian politicians did not take the necessary steps to establish schools with Romanian as the language of instruction. Moreover, they took a series of repressive measures against the existing schools. In their textbook, Aguletti and Petrescu make it abundantly clear that the Romanian problem was most upsetting in Hungary. The Law of Nationalities was categorised as a measure favourable to non-Hungarian peoples, but Hungarian politicians failed to uphold it, and the authors note several aspects regarding the duplicity of Hungarians in this respect.<sup>43</sup>

As for Lupaş’s textbooks, they strongly emphasise the hypocrisy of Hungarian politicians and maintain that the darkest period for Transylvanian Romanians was when Minister Apponyi “furiously persecuted the Romanian schools.”<sup>44</sup> They also point out that Hungary’s prime minister, the famous István Tisza, admitted in the Hungarian Parliament that the Law of Nationalities was practically impossible to apply and that, although the Romanian leaders’ demands were rather modest, they could not be accepted because “the Hungarian stomach could not bear them.”<sup>45</sup>

In their textbooks, Aguletti and Petrescu argue that what followed was “a long and strenuous battle between the Hungarians and the Romanian element subjugated until the 1918 emancipation.”<sup>46</sup> As for Lupaş, he traces the path of Transylvanian Romanians who were progressively more oppressed and deprived of their rights by the Hungarians and whose leaders tried to find solutions to improve the situation. The Romanians reacted by initially forming a political party and adopting passivism as a tactic. The results of these actions were

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<sup>42</sup> Original text: “între Ungaria și Austria s-a încheiat așa-numitul dualism” and “celorlate neamuri nu li se recunoștea calitatea de națiuni politice.” Ibid., 363.

<sup>43</sup> Aguletti, Petrescu, *Manual de istorie pentru clasa III-a secundară*, 151.

<sup>44</sup> Original text: “a prigonit în mod furios școalele românești.” Lupaş, *Istoria Românilor* (1923), 364.

<sup>45</sup> Original text: “stomacul maghiar nu le putea primi.” Ibid., 364.

<sup>46</sup> Original text: “o lungă și înverșunată luptă a urmat între unguri și elementul românesc subjugat până la desrobirea din 1918.” Aguletti, Petrescu, *Manual de istorie pentru clasa III-a secundară*, 152.

delayed. Thus, the Romanians resorted to drafting a memorandum whose content focused on the plight and grievances of the Romanian community in the province. The memorandum was presented to the emperor in Vienna. However, the leaders of the Romanians were labelled traitors to the homeland and, as such, imprisoned. As a result of such unsuccessful attempts, Romanians abandoned passivism and turned to activism, yet this too did not prove a winning strategy: "In less than two years (April 1906 - August 1908), several Romanian publicists and political leaders were sentenced to a total of 124 years, 6 months, and 27 days in a state prison. The total fine amounted to over 200,000 Crowns."<sup>47</sup>

All these narratives and the portrayal of Transylvanian Romanians as victims of injustices, deprived of rights and unable to use their language or get an education in their language, are placed in a broader context by the authors. Sporadically, Transylvanian Romanians petitioned for their rights together with the other nationalities that were subjected to a similar treatment throughout the Empire. For instance, the authors mention the year 1895 when the representatives of Romanians, Serbs and Slovaks in Hungary held a Congress in Budapest and established a common action and defence program.<sup>48</sup> Another significant moment was the transition from passivism to activism, a decision made in concert with the representatives of the same ethnic communities. However, despite these concerted efforts, no significant progress was made.

In these circumstances, the Romanians are portrayed as victims of long-term injustices, and the Union appears as a natural act and the means for them to escape this situation. Through wording such as "merciless persecution against all non-Hungarian schools, which they ruthlessly dissolved,"<sup>49</sup> "oppressive drives,"<sup>50</sup> "persecutions that were becoming increasingly more intense,"<sup>51</sup> the ideas of unprecedented oppression and relentless resistance are induced. The textbook edited by Lupaş discusses the spiritual preparation of Transylvanian Romanians for the Great Union. They talk about the inevitability of this kind of preparation because: "Even if the foreign rulers themselves had been stopped in their tracks, (...) they were tirelessly contributing, year after year, more and more to the spiritual preparation of the Romanian people for the great moment when the historical destiny of national unity was to be fulfilled."<sup>52</sup> The marginalisation and exclusion of Transylvanian Romanians and the denial of

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<sup>47</sup> Original text: "*În mai puțin de doi ani (aprilie 1906-august 1908) mai mulți publiciști și conducători politici ai românilor au fost osândiți la 124 de ani 6 luni și 27 de zile de temniță de stat. În suma totală de amendă în bani a trecut de peste 200000 coroane.*" Lupaş, *Istoria Românilor* (Cluj: Institutul de arte Grafice "Ardealul", 1921), 213.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>49</sup> Original text: "*prigonire fără cruțare contra tuturor școalelor nemaghiare pe care le desființau fără milă.*" Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Original text: "*porniri asupritoare.*" Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Original text: "*persecuții care deveneau din ce în ce mai grele.*" Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Original text: "*chiar de ar fi fost oprite în drum însuși cârmuirile străine [...] au fost neobosite întru a contribui din an în an tot mai mult la pregătirea sufletească a poporului român pentru clipa cea mare când urma să se îndeplinească destinul istoric al unității naționale.*" Lupaş, *Istoria Românilor* (1931), 328.

their rights paradoxically worked as mobilizing and unifying factors. Thus, the Union is attributed to several factors, each event representing a smaller or bigger step forward toward this momentous event even though, by the end of the war, this path was neither the only one, nor clearly defined, nor a certainty. In fact, there was a broad spectrum of alternatives.

### 3. Conclusions

The historical narratives found in the textbooks under analysis describe, by intertwining painful stories with joyful ones, how the Great Union of 1918 was achieved and how the Romanian national state came into being. Ultimately, the dream of the Union was fulfilled due to inspired decisions and favourable circumstances. The themes identified in our analysis are part of the overview of a momentous event, the 1918 Union, that is strongly linked to other events, such as the Great War, as well as to the royalty. The course of history leading to this point was a difficult one, marked by painful narratives of victimization and persecution for the Romanians living in the provinces under foreign rule, especially those in Transylvania. However, these were counterbalanced by resilience, sacrifices, and historical opportunity.

The analysed history textbooks mostly describe the Great War as an essential step toward the 1918 Union. Despite the discontinuities and the controversies surrounding this event, this idea has remained canonical. A mixture of losses and victories, the war was glorified for the heroism of the soldiers and their steadfast struggle despite the very harsh circumstances and moral dilemmas it generated.

The textbooks connect the theme of the Union with that of royalty, cultivating the image of a charismatic and almost messianic king with an extraordinary sense of duty. The Romanian royals, who actively participated in the war through their decisions and actions, played a major role in achieving the great milestone of uniting all Romanian-inhabited provinces into a single state, Romania. Their leadership, patriotism and sense of duty are unquestionable.

Intimately connected to the war and the royalty, the Union is also described as an act of historical justice for Transylvanian Romanians – a triumph over oppression and a path to freedom. Considering Ernest Renan's well-known 1896 postulate that a nation represents "a daily plebiscite," one can argue that the act of uniting Transylvania with Romania was literally a plebiscite, given the firm expression of the population's will at the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia.

Although the analysed textbooks do not discuss these events at length, treating them in a descriptive, concise, relatively linear, and univocal manner, the way they have permeated the public consciousness demonstrates that they have been valued and legitimised as some of the most important events in the history of Romania as well as Central and Eastern Europe.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean